

This flyer provides information regarding changes to how *BEST Literacy* scores should be interpreted effective July 1, 2008. These changes will affect the work of state adult education directors, adult ESL program administrators and practitioners, test administrators and scorers, and data managers. One of the key changes affects the score ranges for the lower NRS levels which have changed significantly, meaning that students may need more time to show progress at these levels.

This revised guidance on how *BEST Literacy* scores are interpreted will likely have ramifications for the number of students counted within National Reporting System (NRS) ESL Educational Functioning Levels, how targets are proposed for advancement from one NRS level to the next, and state and program data systems housing student test data.

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Changes

For over 20 years, *BEST Literacy* (and its predecessor *BEST literacy skills section*) has been used to help adult ESL teachers plan instruction by measuring the progress that adult English language learners make in English reading and writing. As the test developer and publisher, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) periodically reviews the content and score interpretations associated with the assessment to ensure that it remains a valid and reliable assessment for the adult ESL field. As such, the test was updated in 2006.

In 2007, a study was conducted to determine how scores on the revised *BEST Literacy* test align with the revised NRS educational functioning levels and revised Student Performance Levels (SPLs)[†]. As a result of the recent study, *BEST Literacy* scores are now independently aligned with both the NRS ESL educational functioning levels and the SPLs. See charts 1 and 2 on this page for new score interpretation guidelines.

The changes to the *BEST Literacy* score ranges and alignment to the NRS levels and SPLs will take effect on July 1, 2008. Adult ESL programs and education agencies are urged to undertake specific actions prior to the beginning of the program year 2008- 2009 in order to manage the changes to the *BEST Literacy* score interpretation chart.

[†] Please note that programs may use either or both NRS levels or SPLs; however, all federally-funded programs must report student progress using NRS levels. For more information about NRS, see www.nrsweb.org.

Chart 1: NRS ESL Educational Functioning Levels and current and new *BEST Literacy* scale score ranges

| NRS Levels | Current Scale Score Range Valid until June 30, 2008 | New Scale Score Range Effective July 1, 2008 |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Beginning ESL Literacy | 0-7 | 0-20 |
| Low Beginning ESL | 8-35 | 21-52 |
| High Beginning ESL | 36-46 | 53-63 |
| Low Intermediate ESL | 47-53 | 64-67 |
| High Intermediate ESL | 54-65 | 68-75 |
| Advanced ESL | 66-78* | 76-78* |

Chart 2: *BEST Literacy* scale score and Student Performance Levels (SPLs) in Reading and Writing

| Reading and Writing SPL Level | Scale Score Range Effective July 1, 2008 |
|----------------------------------|---|
| SPL 0 | 0 |
| SPL 1 | 1-12 |
| SPL 2 | 13-30 |
| SPL 3 | 31-53 |
| SPL 4 | 54-66 |
| SPL 5 | 67-71 |
| SPL 6 | 72-74 |
| SPL 7 | 75-77 |
| SPL 8 | 78* |

* If an examinee pretests into SPL 8 with a scale score of 78, or into the NRS Advanced ESL level with a scale score of 76-78, use a different ESL assessment that measures higher reading and writing skills to more accurately measure an examinee's language ability. Any student that falls into this category should be re-tested with another assessment at the time of pre-testing.

Information for State-level Education Agencies

State-level education agencies funding adult ESL services (e.g., state departments of education, state departments of labor and workforce development, literacy volunteer headquarters) will be affected by the *BEST Literacy* score interpretation changes and alignment to the revised NRS levels. To prepare for this change, state-level agencies that fund programs serving adult English language learners and using *BEST Literacy* should do the following:

- Revise the program's electronic NRS data management tables to reflect new *BEST Literacy* score ranges associated with each NRS ESL Educational Functioning Level. Make copies of Chart 1 (see p. 1) available to all data entry personnel, assessment and instructional specialists, and other stakeholders. If students' SPLs are also recorded in the data system, Chart 2 (see p. 1) must be distributed as well.
- Develop guidelines in the state assessment policy to address the lack of exit criteria for the small percentage of students at the Advanced ESL level for *BEST Literacy* (e.g., provide recommendations for assessing speaking and listening if students wish to improve their oral English proficiency, or for using a different literacy assessment).
- Consider the need for changes in state guidelines for programs serving students at the lower levels who may need more time to show progress. Guidelines may also need to be reviewed for the creation or reformulation of classes, programs, materials, and services provided to students who may have been reclassified.
- If necessary, reevaluate the state's negotiated performance levels with the U.S. Department of Education for PY 2008- 2009 to reflect expectations about student progress at the revised NRS levels. As a service to the field, CAL can help states assess how the revised *BEST Literacy* scale score ranges will affect overall state negotiated targets for ESL level gain. State-level agencies interested in this service should contact CAL directly: BESTLiteracy@cal.org.
- Explore options for providing resources and professional development to adult ESL programs in the state, e.g., aligning instruction and assessment at various levels of English proficiency. **For more information on adult ESL instructional methods, visit the CAELA Web site: www.cal.org/caela.**
- Continue to provide timely information about federal and state reporting requirements and the state assessment policy to local programs.

Information for Adult ESL programs

Programs that provide services to adult English language learners and use *BEST Literacy* should do the following:

- Revise the program's electronic NRS data management tables to reflect new *BEST Literacy* score ranges associated with each NRS ESL Educational Functioning Level. Make paper copies of Chart 1 (see p.1) available to all data entry personnel, *BEST Literacy* test administrators and scorers, assessment specialists, and data managers. If students' SPLs are also recorded in the data system, Chart 2 (see p.1) must be distributed as well.
- Share the revised *BEST Literacy* and NRS correlation tables with instructional staff. In particular, note that the score ranges for the lower NRS levels, Beginning ESL Literacy through High Beginning ESL, have changed significantly, meaning that students may need more time to show progress at these levels. These changes may affect program reporting of student progress to the state education agency and should be considered when negotiating targeted performance levels.
- Revise program placement procedures as necessary. Starting on July 1, 2008, pretest scores should be interpreted using the new score interpretation tables. This may result in students placing into a lower NRS level than was previously assigned by the former *BEST Literacy* scale score range chart. Programs may wish to reevaluate their course offerings and their alignment with NRS ESL Educational Functioning Levels or SPLs.
- Note that students can still test into all six of the NRS levels, including Advanced ESL, with *BEST Literacy*. However, *BEST Literacy* scores cannot qualify students to meet the NRS exit criteria. If a student pretests into the NRS Advanced ESL level with a scale score of 76-78, a different test should be used to show the student's progress and ability to meet the NRS exit criteria. Therefore, the student should be re-tested at the time of pre-testing.

Stay Up to Date

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To learn about other CAL projects and services sign up for CALNews.

Join at: www.cal.org/join/index.html

FAQs

How are *BEST Literacy* scale scores interpreted?

Language proficiency levels defined by descriptors are often used as a framework to aid in test score interpretation. Scores on *BEST Literacy* have been correlated to the National Reporting System (NRS) ESL Educational Functioning Levels for federal accountability reporting, as well as to the Student Performance Levels (SPLs).

Are SPLs required for reporting student progress?

Most adult ESL programs are not required to use SPLs in tracking and reporting student progress. However, SPLs can be a helpful tool in providing additional information and feedback to teachers and students about student progress in English. Each SPL descriptor gives an overview of what adult ESL students can do in speaking, listening, reading, or writing upon entry into a specific level. Complete reading and writing SPL descriptors can be found in the *BEST Literacy Test Manual* or on the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Web site.

SPL descriptors are located at: www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/rwsppls.html.

What changes have been made to *BEST Literacy* score interpretations?

BEST Literacy scale score interpretations have changed (previously found in Appendix C, D, and E of the *BEST Literacy Test Manual* 2006 edition). There are now two separate scale score interpretation tables (shown on page 1 of this flyer). The score range to show gain using *BEST Literacy* has changed significantly across some of the revised NRS levels and SPLs.

When do these changes take place?

For reporting purposes, these changes should be implemented at state education agencies and in adult education ESL programs on July 1, 2008. Prior to that date, programs and agencies should begin adjusting their data management systems to prepare for the changes by the deadline. (See the section *Information for Adult ESL Programs* in this flyer for more information.)

How were these changes determined?

CAL conducted a technical study, called a standard setting study, in April 2007 that examined the alignment of *BEST Literacy* scores with the NRS levels (revised in 2006) and the SPLs. The study utilized a panel of ten adult ESL specialists from across the country who made independent decisions about which NRS levels and SPL descriptors best characterized performance of a diverse set of examinees. Using proven quantitative analytic procedures, the data from the adult ESL specialists were analyzed and resulted in the revised correlation of *BEST Literacy* scores with the revised NRS ESL Educational Functioning Levels and the SPLs.

What impact do these changes have on states and adult ESL programs using *BEST Literacy*?

States and adult ESL programs using *BEST Literacy* in Program Year 2008–2009 (which begins on July 1, 2008) must ensure that the new score interpretation charts located in this flyer are used for reporting pretest and posttest scores to the NRS and for negotiating target performance levels with the U.S. Department of Education.

Where can I get more information?

Website: www.cal.org/bestliteracy

Email: Bestliteracy@cal.org

Phone: 1-866-845-BEST (2378)

Fax: 1-888-700-3629

For more information about the score interpretation changes, standard setting study, or technical information related to the development of *BEST Literacy*, the *BEST Literacy Technical Report* may be downloaded as a PDF after March 1, 2008.

Download the *BEST Literacy* Technical Report after March 1 at: www.cal.org/bestliteracy.

CAL's Commitment to the Adult ESL Field

- The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) has been informed of the changes to interpreting *BEST Literacy* scores beginning July 1, 2008. *BEST Literacy* continues to be an approved test for use with NRS reporting; the NRS ESL Educational Functioning Level chart on the NRS Web site will be revised to reflect the new alignments.

Visit the NRS Website: www.nrsweb.org.

- CAL staff can help state education agencies assess how the revised *BEST Literacy* scale score ranges will affect anticipated student placement into NRS levels and negotiated targets for ESL level gain. State education agencies interested in this service can contact CAL directly at BESTLiteracy@cal.org, beginning in January 2008.
- A revised *BEST Literacy Test Manual* (2008 edition) will be available in spring, 2008. The new manual will contain revised score interpretation tables with correlations between *BEST Literacy* scores and the revised NRS levels and SPLs. **Programs that purchased the 2006 edition of the *BEST Literacy Test Manual* will receive the 2008 edition free of charge.**
- The *BEST Literacy Technical Report*, providing a detailed technical analysis, will be available as a downloadable PDF form from CAL's Web site beginning March 1, 2008.

Information for Programs using *BEST Literacy*

See inside for information about new
BEST Literacy score interpretations
taking effect July 1, 2008.

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